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## USDA: Recruiting Volunteers Via the Web

On April 16, in the latest initiative to get citizens more involved in their local communities, the President re-launched a multi-agency collaboration effort called USA Freedom Corps to recruit volunteers nationwide. USA Freedom Corps seeks to capitalize on each person's talents and works in conjunction with Federal agencies, businesses and local and international communities to promote volunteerism throughout the world. With the tagline "Everybody Can Do Something", USA Freedom Corps supports diverse causes, recognizes talent and above all else, makes information on volunteering easily accessible.

USA Freedom Corps serves as a central resource for all volunteer opportunities including those run or encouraged by Federal agencies that rely on the active participation of citizens in the delivery of programs and services. An interested individual seeking to volunteer in his area can now find opportunities much easier than before. The person must first visit the Web site [www.usafreedomcorps.gov](http://www.usafreedomcorps.gov). Then he fills in what type of community service that's of interest and a zip code. Once this information is submitted, the nearest volunteering opportunities are displayed.

Over thirteen different Federal agencies are currently partnering with USA Freedom Corps to promote volunteerism. USA Freedom Corps' site, [www.usafreedomcorps.gov](http://www.usafreedomcorps.gov), includes the resources of [www.volunteer.gov/gov](http://www.volunteer.gov/gov) which USDA's Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service (CSREES) and Natural Resource and Conservation Service (NRCS) actively help maintain. USDA's Forest Service (FS) provides strong volunteer opportunities too. The Forest Service recently sponsored the National Clean-Up River week in May 10-17. It coordinated citizen efforts across the US to take care a valuable resource –our waterways.

Through the USA Freedom Corps portal, interested citizens can seek a variety of opportunities to put their skills to use. Some can volunteer as a reader through the Reading Buddy program or individuals with strong technical experience and business acumen can volunteer their special-

ized skills through international programs such as the Middle East Partnership Initiative.

USA Freedom Corps created a Volunteer Action Priority that dedicates a quarter of each calendar year to a specific area of need. These categories include: Youth Achievement, Parks and Open Spaces, Healthy Communities, and Homeland Security. Many of these categories tie directly to the missions of some of USDA's agencies. Each focus highlights not only civic participation but innovative programs for both government and private enterprise to enhance their contributions. Through volunteer programs, USA Freedom Corps supports new initiatives by providing research and information needed to aid in the planning of programs.

In addition to offering information, USA Freedom Corps takes volunteer participation a step further. USA Freedom Corps understands that the volunteer experience is a personal one. In an effort to support this commitment, USA Freedom Corps creates an online space for volunteers. Volunteers can maintain a password protected, online journal to record their contributions to the community, the hours they logged and any other personal insights that they wish to record for themselves.

In recognition of the time, dedication and commitment to civic participation, USA Freedom Corps provides scholarships, grants and awards including the President's Volunteer Award. USA Freedom Corps works closely with the Take Pride in America Awards ([www.takepride.gov](http://www.takepride.gov)) that are given to both individuals and organizations. To receive the award, recipients must demonstrate outstanding dedication to the community. Further illustrating the contributions and positive impact that volunteerism has on local communities, national recognition took place during the annual Celebrate Volunteers Week April 27th – May 3<sup>rd</sup>.

So whether one is interested in teaching or helping out at the local animal shelter, the information on where to go and whom to contact is all at one's fingertips and just a click away.

Visit [www.volunteer.gov/gov](http://www.volunteer.gov/gov), [www.takepride.gov](http://www.takepride.gov), or [www.usafreedomcorps.com](http://www.usafreedomcorps.com) to learn more about volunteer opportunities in your area.

## Logging In & Clicking On: Americans Like eGovernment

Whether it's Americans' need for up-to-date recreation information or filing their taxes, people are logging in and clicking onto eGovernment sites in record numbers. A recent report, released by the Hart-Teeter Institute on behalf of the Council of Excellence in Government, credits the increase to a rising comfort level in navigating the Web.

The study found that half of all Americans and three-quarters of all Internet users have visited a government Web site for research. What's more, a total of 74% of users agree that eGovernment makes information gathering and transactions smoother, faster, convenient, and more accessible. These individuals reported that they directly see the positive impact of eGovernment on their lives. And while the overall traffic on government sites today is focused on finding information, citizens eagerly embrace the growing ability to conduct transactions from the comfort of their PCs—over 65% of those surveyed said that they see transactions as the real value in electronic government. Further, Americans view eGovernment as a tool that represents increased accountability and efficiency in government by enabling citizens to play a greater role in democracy and self-government.

However, despite the public's attention to eGovernment, their grasp of its potential, and their interest in electronic transactions, over 33% of these online citizens had significant concerns about providing personal information to the government over the Web.

Working to adhere to the Government Paper Elimination Act (GPEA) mandate passed by Congress in 1996, the greatest challenge to eGovernment, as it continues to evolve, is convincing the public that Internet-based transactions and information are secure. USDA is addressing security and privacy concerns through several measures. First, USDA developed a checks-and-balance system, with each step of electronic transactions first approved by the Office of the Chief Information Officer's Cyber Security office. Second, USDA's eAuthentication initiative is designed to help secure Web-based services while providing an easy, one password sign-in for all USDA Web sites. USDA takes these steps to secure the Department's systems and transactions as a prerequisite to our eGovernment success. It is also USDA's priority to ensure that every interaction is timely, efficient and that those

involved—whether federal employees, customers, or citizens—feel at ease.

For more information on the *New eGovernment Equation: Ease, Engagement, Privacy & Protection* study, please visit [www.excelgov.org](http://www.excelgov.org). Our next issue of the eGovernment newsletter will be completely devoted to the results of other national research in this regard, customer feedback on our Web sites and on the results of several usability studies taking place in a variety of USDA agencies.

## Agency eGovernment in the News: Natural Resources Conservation Service

Congratulations to USDA's NRCS! The American Society for Public Administration (ASPA), a professional organization for Federal, state, and local public administrators, applauds the agency's great strides in providing public access and demonstrating financial accountability. Specifically, APSA recently recognized NRCS with the Center for Accountability and Performance Leadership (CAPL) Award—the first time that ASPA designates this prestigious award to a Federal agency.

The award also recognizes the large strides USDA is making in its continued effort to make the Department more transparent and user-friendly to Federal employees, inter-agency partners, and the public. Additionally, as agencies continue their efforts to meet the requirements of the Government Paperwork Elimination Act (GPEA) to provide electronic options for citizens to interact with Federal agencies, NRCS' success is an example of what agencies can achieve with limited time and resources.

NRCS received the award in part because of its new Integrated Accountability System, which allows the agency to collect high-quality information. In line with the CAPL Award criteria, the system shifts much of the information-gathering burden off of field staff by centralizing information and saving time. It both ensures consistent data collection nationwide and makes the information gathered easily accessible to those who need it.

For more information on this and other NRCS initiatives, please visit [www.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov). For more information on compliance with GPEA, contact the eGovernment Team.

**For more information on any of these topics, or for general comments or questions, contact the eGovernment Team at:**

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